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**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

SIERRA CLUB, INC.; SURFRIDER FOUNDATION, INC.; HEAL THE BAY, INC.; and BAYKEEPER, INC.; each a California Nonprofit,

Plaintiffs,

V.

EXXONMOBIL CORPORATION, a New Jersey Corporation, and DOES 1-10,

Defendants.

Case No. 3:24-cv-07288-RS

**DEFENDANT EXXON MOBIL
CORPORATION'S NOTICE OF
MOTION AND MOTION TO
DISMISS; MEMORANDUM OF
POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN
SUPPORT THEREOF**

Hearing Date: June 5, 2025
Time: 1:30 p.m.
Location: Courtroom 3, 17th Fl.

Hon. Richard Seeborg

[SPECIAL MOTION TO STRIKE FILED
CONCURRENTLY HEREWITH]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION TO DISMISS	1
MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES	2
I. INTRODUCTION	2
II. STATEMENT OF ISSUES TO BE DECIDED	4
III. STATEMENT OF FACTS	5
A. Historical Statements	6
B. Current Statements About Advanced Recycling	7
C. Plaintiffs' Theory Of Causation.....	8
IV. ARGUMENT	8
A. Plaintiffs Do Not Allege A Viable Nuisance Claim	8
1. Plaintiffs do not allege an actionable theory of nuisance liability	9
2. Plaintiffs fail to allege causation.....	12
B. Plaintiffs Do Not Allege A Viable UCL Claim	14
1. Plaintiffs do not allege unlawful conduct.....	15
2. Plaintiffs do not allege unfair conduct.	17
3. Plaintiffs allege no actionable misrepresentations	18
C. Plaintiffs' Complaint Impermissibly Seeks To Regulate Beyond California.....	23
V. CONCLUSION	25

1 TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	Page(s)
Cases	
<i>AMA Multimedia, LLC v. Wanat</i> , 970 F.3d 1201 (9th Cir. 2020).....	24, 25
<i>Aryeh v. Canon Bus. Sols., Inc.</i> , 55 Cal. 4th 1185 (2013)	14, 15
<i>Ashcroft v. Iqbal</i> , 556 U.S. 662 (2009).....	12, 13
<i>Axiom Foods, Inc. v. Acerchem Int'l, Inc.</i> , 874 F.3d 1064 (9th Cir. 2017).....	25
<i>Becerra v. Dr Pepper/Seven Up, Inc.</i> , 945 F.3d 1225 (9th Cir. 2019).....	19
<i>Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly</i> , 550 U.S. 544 (2007).....	13
<i>Bigelow v. Virginia</i> , 421 U.S. 809 (1975).....	24
<i>Brown v. Madison Reed, Inc.</i> , 2023 WL 8613496 (9th Cir. Dec. 13, 2023)	19
<i>Burdick v. Superior Ct.</i> , 233 Cal. App. 4th 8 (2015).....	25
<i>Cal. Med. Ass'n v. Aetna Health of Cal. Inc.</i> , 14 Cal. 5th 1075 (2023)	14
<i>California v. Exxon Mobil Corp.</i> , No. 3:24-v-07594-RS (Jan. 9, 2025).....	5
<i>Citizens for Odor Nuisance Abatement v. City of San Diego</i> , 8 Cal. App. 5th 350 (2017).....	12
<i>City of Los Angeles v. Barr</i> , 941 F.3d 931 (9th Cir. 2019).....	16
<i>City of Merced Redev. Agency v. Exxon Mobil Corp.</i> , 2015 WL 471672 (E.D. Cal. Feb. 4, 2015)	10
<i>City of Modesto Redev. Agency v. Superior Court</i> , 119 Cal. App. 4th 28 (2004).....	9, 10, 11
<i>City of San Diego v. U.S. Gypsum Co.</i> , 30 Cal. App. 4th 575 (1994).....	9
<i>Cnty. of Santa Clara v. Atl. Richfield Co.</i> , 137 Cal. App. 4th 292 (2006).....	3, 9, 10
<i>Doe v. CVS Pharm., Inc.</i> , 982 F.3d 1204 (9th Cir. 2020).....	17
<i>Edmundson v. Procter & Gamble Co.</i> , 537 F. App'x 708 (9th Cir. 2013)	19
<i>Edmunson v. Procter & Gamble Co.</i> , 2011 WL 1897625 (S.D. Cal. May 17, 2011)	19
<i>Fischer v. United States</i> , 603 U.S. 480 (2024).....	16

1 **TABLE OF AUTHORITIES**
 2 **(continued)**

		Page(s)
3	<i>Garcia v. Sony Computer Ent. Am., LLC,</i> 859 F. Supp. 2d 1056 (N.D. Cal. 2012)	18
4	<i>George v. Susanville Elementary Sch. Dist.,</i> 103 Cal. App. 5th 349 (2024).....	16
5	<i>Hinds Invs., L.P. v. Angioli,</i> 445 F. App'x 917 (9th Cir. 2011)	9, 10
6	<i>Hodson v. Mars, Inc.,</i> 891 F.3d 857 (9th Cir. 2018).....	17, 21
7	<i>HomeLight, Inc. v. Shkipin,</i> 721 F. Supp. 3d 1019 (N.D. Cal. 2024)	14
8	<i>In re Ethereummax Inv. Litig.,</i> 2023 WL 6787827 (C.D. Cal. June 6, 2023)	19
9	<i>In re Turner,</i> 859 F.3d 1145 (9th Cir. 2017).....	14
10	<i>Int'l Shoe Co. v. Washington,</i> 326 U.S. 310 (1945).....	24
11	<i>Khoja v. Orexigen Therapeutics, Inc.,</i> 899 F.3d 988 (9th Cir. 2018).....	5
12	<i>Kirsopp v. Yamaha Motor Co.,</i> 2014 WL 12577429 (C.D. Cal. Aug. 27, 2014).....	18
13	<i>Kottle v. Nw. Kidney Ctrs.,</i> 146 F.3d 1056 (9th Cir. 1998).....	20
14	<i>Leocal v. Ashcroft,</i> 543 U.S. 1 (2004).....	16
15	<i>Mitchell v. Gonzales,</i> 54 Cal. 3d 1041 (1991)	12
16	<i>Myers v. Starbucks Corp.,</i> 2020 WL 13302437 (C.D. Cal. July 29, 2020)	22
17	<i>Nat'l Shooting Sports Found., Inc. v. State,</i> 5 Cal. 5th 428 (2018)	16
18	<i>Newcal Indus., Inc. v. Ikon Off. Sol.,</i> 513 F.3d 1038 (9th Cir. 2008).....	19, 22
19	<i>Oestreicher v. Alienware Corp.,</i> 544 F. Supp. 2d 964 (N.D. Cal. 2008)	19
20	<i>Orange Cnty. Water Dist. v. Alcoa Global Fasteners, Inc.,</i> 12 Cal. App. 5th 252 (2017).....	13
21	<i>Patricia A. Murray Dental Corp. v. Dentsply Int'l, Inc.,</i> 19 Cal. App. 5th 258 (2018).....	19, 23
22	<i>People by James v. PepsiCo, Inc.,</i> 222 N.Y.S.3d 907 (2024)	14, 22
23	<i>People ex rel. Gallegos v. Pac. Lumber Co.,</i> 158 Cal. App. 4th 950 (2008) (UCL)	20

1 **TABLE OF AUTHORITIES**
 2 **(continued)**

		Page(s)
3	<i>People v. ConAgra Grocery Products Co.,</i> 17 Cal. App. 5th 51 (2017).....	9
4	<i>Realtek Semiconductor Corp. v. MediaTek, Inc.,</i> 2024 WL 1975478 (N.D. Cal. May 3, 2024)	20
5	<i>Rezner v. Bayerische Hypo-Und Vereinsbank AG,</i> 2011 WL 6329854 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 8, 2011).....	15
6	<i>Schwarzenegger v. Fred Martin Motor Co.,</i> 374 F.3d 797 (9th Cir. 2004).....	24
7	<i>Sepanossian v. Nat'l Ready Mix Co.,</i> 97 Cal. App. 5th 192 (2023).....	19
8	<i>Sponchiado v. Apple Inc.,</i> 2019 WL 6117482 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 18, 2019).....	23
9	<i>State of Cal. Auto. Dismantlers Ass'n v. Interins. Exch.,</i> 180 Cal. App. 3d 735 (1986).....	24
10	<i>Team Enters., LLC v. W. Inv. Real Estate Tr.,</i> 647 F.3d 901 (9th Cir. 2011).....	3, 9, 10
11	<i>Walker v. Dreyer's Grand Ice Cream, Inc.,</i> 2006 WL 2642535 (N.D. Cal. Sept. 14, 2006)	17
12	<i>Will Co. v. Lee,</i> 47 F.4th 917 (9th Cir. 2022).....	25
13	<i>Williams v. Yamaha Motor Co.</i> 1015, 1020 (9th Cir. 2017).....	24
14	<i>Wilson v. Frito-Lay N. Am., Inc.,</i> 2013 WL 1320468 (N.D. Cal. Apr. 1, 2013)	18
15	<i>X Corp. v. Ctr. for Countering Digital Hate Ltd.,</i> 724 F. Supp. 3d 921 (N.D. Cal. 2024)	25
16	<i>Yamashita v. LG Chem, Ltd.,</i> 62 F.4th 496 (9th Cir. 2023).....	25
17	<i>Young v. New Haven Advocate,</i> 315 F.3d 256 (4th Cir. 2002).....	25
18	Statutes	
19	42 U.S.C. § 13101(b)	2
20	Alameda County Waste Management Authority Mandatory Recycling Ord. 2012-01	5
21	Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 17204	14
22	Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 17208	14
23	Cal. Fish & Game Code § 12000	16
24	Cal. Fish & Game Code § 5650	15
25	Cal. Fish & Game Code § 5650.1(a).....	16
26	Cal. Fish & Game Code § 5652	15
27	Cal. Gov't Code § 12600(b).....	17

1 **TABLE OF AUTHORITIES**
 2 **(continued)**

		Page(s)
3 Cal. Gov't Code § 12607	17	
4 Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 14500	5	
5 Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 14576(a).....	11	
6 Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 18000	2, 5	
7 Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 18015	5	
8 Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 18017	5	
9 Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 40000	5	
10 Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 41780.01	5	
11 Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 42300	5	
12 Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 42649	5	
13 Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 42649.2	5	
14 Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 42924.5	5	
15 Cal. Pub. Res. Code §§ 14547	5	
16 City of San Mateo Mun. Code § 27.86.030	5	
17 Los Angeles Mun. Code § 66.00.1.....	5	
18 Los Angeles Mun. Code § 66.03(i).....	5	
19 Sacramento City Code § 13.10.34.....	5	
20 San Diego Mun. Ord. §§ 66.0705	5	
21 San Diego Mun. Ord. §§ 66.0706	5	
22 San Francisco Environment Code § 1903.....	5	
23 San Jose Code of Ordinances § 20.70.470.....	5	
24 <u>Other Authorities</u>		
25 Cal. Civ. Jury Instructions § 430.....	12	
26 <i>Permit</i> , MERRIAM WEBSTER, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/permit ;		
27 <i>Permit</i> , BLACK'S LAW DICTIONARY (12th ed. 2024)	16	
28 <i>Permit</i> , OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY, https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=permit	16	

1 **NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION TO DISMISS**

2 **TO THE COURT, ALL PARTIES, AND THEIR COUNSEL OF RECORD:**

3 Please take notice that on June 5, 2025, at 1:30 p.m. or as soon thereafter as the matter
4 may be heard, in Courtroom 3 of the San Francisco Courthouse, located at 450 Golden Gate
5 Avenue, Floor 17, San Francisco, CA 94102, Defendant Exxon Mobil Corporation
6 ("ExxonMobil"), by and through its undersigned counsel, will and hereby does move the Court
7 for an order dismissing the Complaint filed by Plaintiffs Sierra Club, Inc.; Surfrider Foundation,
8 Inc.; Heal The Bay, Inc.; and Baykeeper, Inc.

9 ExxonMobil seeks dismissal, with prejudice, pursuant to Federal Rules of Civil
10 Procedure 12(b)(2) and 12(b)(6), based upon this Notice of Motion, the accompanying
11 Memorandum of Points and Authorities,, any oral argument the Court may permit, and all
12 pleadings and papers on file in this action and on such other matters as may be presented to the
13 Court at or before the hearing.

14

15 Dated: March 27, 2025

O'MELVENY & MYERS LLP

16

17 By: */s/ Dawn Sestito*

18

19 *Counsel for Defendant Exxon Mobil*
20 *Corporation*

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MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

Plastic pollution has no place in the environment. For decades, public and private actors concerned with plastic pollution have promoted recycling as one solution among many. The State of California, for example, has long declared that “[f]acilitating the recycling of plastics is in the best interests of the state.” Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 18000. Federal law, too, reflects a “national policy” in favor of recycling. 42 U.S.C. § 13101(b). Plaintiffs, four environmental organizations, have also long advocated recycling, urging the public to “aim to recycle anything made of plastic.”¹

In this lawsuit, Plaintiffs seek to hold ExxonMobil liable for allegedly promoting the benefits and recyclability of plastic—just as the State of California, the federal government, and Plaintiffs themselves have done for years. Unsurprisingly, Plaintiffs’ theory of how ExxonMobil’s speech could have caused them harm is beyond attenuated. Plaintiffs contend that ExxonMobil “created a single-use plastics pollution crisis,” Compl. ¶ 1, by engaging in a “decades-long campaign asserting that single-use plastics trash is harmless and can be disposed of easily and safely,” *id.* ¶ 3. Of course, ExxonMobil does not manufacture single-use plastics or advertise them to consumers. Nevertheless, Plaintiffs’ theory appears to be that ExxonMobil set out to convince the public that single-use plastics are recyclable to increase consumer demand for single-use plastics, which in turn would increase demand for ExxonMobil’s plastic polymers, the raw material used to make some plastic products. “Consumers,” Plaintiffs allege, “purchased more plastics made from virgin polymers than they otherwise would have” because of ExxonMobil’s statements, *id.* ¶ 138, which in turn resulted in environmental harm.

The idea that consumers made purchasing decisions based on ExxonMobil’s statements as opposed to, for example, their own needs—or policies enacted by the State of California, which for decades has vigorously promoted plastic recycling—is, to put it mildly, a real stretch. Even more of a stretch is the premise, unstated in Plaintiffs’ Complaint, that ExxonMobil’s statements

¹ Bob Schildgen, *Where Can I Recycle #3 Through #6 Plastic?*, SIERRA (Sept. 21, 2015), <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/2015-5-september-october/ask-mr-green/where-can-i-recycle-3-through-6-plastic>.

1 were so effective in convincing consumers to buy plastic products they otherwise would not have
 2 bought that ExxonMobil's statements can be said to have *caused*, or even materially contributed
 3 to, a "single-use plastics pollution crisis."

4 Given the serious nature of Plaintiffs' accusations, one would expect their claims to be
 5 backed by detailed allegations. But Plaintiffs' 241-paragraph Complaint is notably light on the
 6 specific ExxonMobil statements that they contend caused the alleged crisis. Instead, in support of
 7 Plaintiffs' allegation that ExxonMobil engaged in an overwhelming campaign of deception, the
 8 Complaint collects only a handful of statements—most of them made decades ago—that are not
 9 actionable on their face. For example, the Complaint cites a 1983 statement in *The New York*
 10 *Times* that "[m]any plastics can be recovered, processed, and then turned into new products,"
 11 without reference to any specific product. Compl. ¶ 127. That statement is entirely true, not
 12 remotely deceptive, and not remotely actionable. More recently, Plaintiffs cite statements about
 13 ExxonMobil's advanced recycling operations in Baytown, Texas, such as an ExxonMobil annual
 14 sustainability report stating "that 'deployed together' with mechanical recycling, 'advanced'
 15 recycling offers a 'huge opportunity' to 'strengthen circularity' and 'help address the plastic
 16 waste challenge.'" *Id.* ¶ 140. Nothing about that accurate statement provides any support for
 17 Plaintiffs' extraordinary allegations of a decades-long, nationwide campaign of deception.

18 Plaintiffs nevertheless rely on those allegations to accuse ExxonMobil of nuisance and
 19 unfair competition. Those claims fail many times over. Starting with their nuisance claims,
 20 Plaintiffs must show that ExxonMobil promoted plastic "for a hazardous use." *Cnty. of Santa*
Clara v. Atl. Richfield Co., 137 Cal. App. 4th 292, 309-10 (2006); *see also Team Enters., LLC v.*
W. Inv. Real Estate Tr., 647 F.3d 901, 912 (9th Cir. 2011). At most, Plaintiffs allege that
 21 ExxonMobil promoted recycling. But so did Plaintiffs. And so do the federal government, the
 22 State of California, and municipalities across this State. Recycling cannot be deemed a hazardous
 23 use when federal, state, and local policymakers encourage it. Moreover, Plaintiffs do not allege
 24 facts in support of causation. In one conclusory paragraph, Plaintiffs allege that consumers
 25 purchased more plastic because of ExxonMobil's statements. But they do not allege
 26 ExxonMobil's statements were so effective in altering consumer demand that they materially
 27

1 altered global pollution levels. Indeed, the notion that plastic pollution—a global challenge—was
 2 caused by a handful of statements scattered across decades by one raw-material supplier is wholly
 3 implausible. Nor do Plaintiffs explain why ExxonMobil’s statements about recycling caused
 4 plastic to make its way into the environment. There is a fundamental illogic to their claim: Why
 5 would statements about recycling cause products *not* to be recycled and instead end up on
 6 beaches or in waterways?

7 Plaintiffs’ UCL claims fare no better. ExxonMobil obviously did not, for example,
 8 “permit” pollution “to pass into” the waters of this State within the meaning of California’s Fish
 9 & Game Code. Nor does ExxonMobil’s “conduct profit[] from its harms to public trust
 10 resources,” Compl. ¶ 235—ExxonMobil does not make money *because* the environment suffers.
 11 And the decades-old statements Plaintiffs allege to be deceptive are time-barred and not
 12 misleading—in fact, some cited documents do not even say what Plaintiffs claim.

13 Perhaps the clearest signal that Plaintiffs’ lawsuit is defective, though, is what it would
 14 mean for them. If Plaintiffs are right that promoting recycling creates liability for plastic
 15 pollution, then *they* are liable under the Fish & Game Code, for they too promoted recycling. Not
 16 only that, Plaintiffs’ theory would mean that they, the federal government, and the State of
 17 California are liable for public nuisance. Needless to say, a theory that would render the
 18 Plaintiffs, the federal government, and the State of California liable to the public is not one that is
 19 likely to find support in the law. So it is here.

20 For these reasons and those that follow, Plaintiffs’ Complaint should be dismissed.

21 **II. STATEMENT OF ISSUES TO BE DECIDED**

- 22 1. Have Plaintiffs pleaded a viable nuisance claim?
 23 2. Have Plaintiffs pleaded a viable UCL claim?
 24 3. Have Plaintiffs alleged in-state conduct that this Court is authorized to adjudicate and
 25 adequately alleged facts to support personal jurisdiction?

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1 **III. STATEMENT OF FACTS²**

2 Everyone agrees that plastic pollution is a serious problem. For decades, policymakers,
 3 including the State of California and its municipalities, have vigorously promoted recycling as
 4 one solution.³ To this day, the State encourages “[m]aximizing the reuse and recycling of all
 5 materials sold in California.”⁴ The State has even told the public that “with recycling, there’s no
 6 such thing as too much of a good thing.”⁵ Plaintiffs have likewise encouraged consumers to
 7 “recycle anything made of plastic,”⁶ calling “recycling” a key “proposal[] for avoiding or
 8 mitigating [environmental] problems,” and holding educational events “to help get kids aware and
 9 excited about recycling.”⁷

10 In this lawsuit, Plaintiffs contend that ExxonMobil is responsible for the effects of global

11 ² For purposes of this Motion to Dismiss only, ExxonMobil accepts as true the Complaint’s well-
 12 pleaded factual allegations. The Court may consider the underlying documents Plaintiffs cite in
 13 their Complaint “as though … part of the complaint itself” under the doctrine of “incorporation
 14 by reference,” which “prevents plaintiffs from selecting only portions of documents that support
 15 their claims, while omitting portions of those very documents that weaken—or doom—their
 16 claims.” *Khoja v. Orexigen Therapeutics, Inc.*, 899 F.3d 988, 1002 (9th Cir. 2018).

17 ³ Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 14500 et seq.; *id.* § 18000, *id.* § 40000 et seq.; *id.* §§ 42300 et seq.; *id.*
 18 § 41780.01; *id.* § 42649; *id.* § 42924.5; *id.* § 42649.2; *id.* §§ 14547, 18017; *id.* § 18015; Los
 19 Angeles Mun. Code § 66.00.1; *id.* § 66.03(i); Sacramento City Code § 13.10.34; San Diego Mun.
 20 Ord. §§ 66.0705, 66.0706; San Francisco Environment Code § 1903; City of San Mateo Mun.
 21 Code § 27.86.030; San Jose Code of Ordinances § 20.70.470; Alameda County Waste
 22 Management Authority Mandatory Recycling Ord. 2012-01.

23 ⁴ *California’s Statewide Commission on Recycling Markets and Curbside Recycling*,
 24 CALRECYCLE (June 30, 2022), <https://www2.calrecycle.ca.gov/Docs/Web/121911> (“Maximizing
 25 the reuse and recycling of all materials sold in California is vital to the state’s larger effort to
 26 build a circular, remanufacturing economy with less pollution.”); *see also CalRecycle Programs*,
 27 CALRECYCLE, <https://calrecycle.ca.gov/Plastics/> (last visited Feb. 25, 2025) (“California is
 28 addressing plastic waste by building a circular economy with efforts to: … Invest and expand
 domestic recycling”).

5 ⁵ *It’s in Your Hands*, CALRECYCLE (2024), *see* Dkt. 21-8, *California v. Exxon Mobil Corp.*, No.
 6 3:24-v-07594-RS (Jan. 9, 2025).

6 ⁶ Schildgen, *supra* note 1.

7 ⁷ *The America’s Cup Comes to San Francisco Bay*, BAYKEEPER NEWS (Summer 2011), at 2,
 8 https://baykeeper.org/files/newsletters/SFBaykeeper_Newsletter_11-Summer_web.pdf; Melissa
 9 Aguayo, *Schools Get a Kick Out of Recycling*, HEAL THE BAY (Apr. 25, 2012),
 10 <http://healthebay.org/schools-get-a-kick-out-of-recycling/>; *see also* Eveline Bravo, *Behind the
 11 Scenes: Recycling with Chivas USA*, HEAL THE BAY (Apr. 5, 2011),
 12 <https://healthebay.org/behind-the-scenes-recycling-with-chivas-usa/> (“We even brought out the
 13 ‘bag monster’ to get the message across that there are many things that can go in the blue bins to
 14 be recycled, including those pesky single-use plastic bags.”).

1 plastic pollution. In support, Plaintiffs cite virtually nothing. The Complaint proffers a handful of
 2 historical statements about plastic and “mechanical recycling”—i.e., “collecti[ng], sorting, and
 3 processing [plastic] materials” for reuse—dating back to the 1960s, none of which appeared on
 4 product-packaging or labels that consumers were likely to see when making purchasing decisions.
 5 Compl. ¶ 7; *id.* ¶¶ 112-28. And it collects a handful of current statements about ExxonMobil’s
 6 advanced recycling operations in Texas. *Id.* ¶¶ 140-44. In total, only 10 paragraphs of Plaintiffs’
 7 241-paragraph Complaint even cite an alleged misstatement. None of those statements is alleged
 8 to have been directed at or made in California.

9 A. **Historical Statements**

10 Parts IV.D.1 and 2 of the Complaint collect a few historical statements about plastic—
 11 some dating as far back as “the 1960s.” Compl. ¶ 113. These allegations fall into two buckets.

12 *First*, Plaintiffs allege that Mobil Corporation misleadingly suggested in the 1960s and
 13 early 1970s that plastic products could be disposed of safely in landfills. *See id.*, Part IV.D.1. In
 14 support of this theory, paragraphs 113 and 114 allege that Mobil Corporation deceptively
 15 compared the benefits of “foam meat trays and egg cartons” to similar paper products—e.g., that
 16 the foam products took up less space in landfills, reduced transportation costs (because they are
 17 lighter), and generated fewer emissions in the manufacturing process. *Id.* ¶¶ 113-14. Meanwhile,
 18 paragraph 115 faults Mobil Corporation for stating that foam “does not decompose readily” when
 19 landfilled. *Id.* ¶ 115. Besides these three paragraphs, Plaintiffs’ Complaint identifies no other
 20 statements in support of their theory that ExxonMobil misleadingly represented that single-use
 21 products could safely be disposed of in landfills.

22 *Second*, Plaintiffs allege that ExxonMobil misleadingly suggested in the 1980s and 1990s
 23 that “mechanical” recycling was an economical solution to disposing of plastic waste. *See id.*,
 24 Part IV.D.2. In support, paragraph 120 quotes a 1989 statement by the National Polystyrene
 25 Recycling Company that “[r]ecycling polystyrene is a highly automated and efficient process”
 26 that involves a “few simple steps.” *Id.* ¶ 120. Paragraph 126 alleges that, around the same time,
 27 Mobil Chemical Company made false statements about the biodegradability of “‘Hefty’ brand
 28 trash bags, resulting in settlements with the Federal Trade Commission and the attorneys general

1 for seven states,” *id.* ¶ 126, including California. Paragraph 127 cites a Mobil Chemical 1983
 2 statement in *The New York Times* truthfully stating that “[m]any plastics can be recovered,
 3 processed and then turned into new products.” *Id.* ¶ 127. (Before suing ExxonMobil, Plaintiffs
 4 had endorsed the same sentiment, recently encouraging consumers not only to “aim to recycle
 5 anything made of plastic,” but also to “keep in mind the possibilities for creative reuse of plastic,”
 6 for which “loads of ideas exist” (some “ingenious”)).⁸ Paragraph 127 of the Complaint also cites
 7 a film from the 1990s by the American Plastics Council (not ExxonMobil) explaining that plastic
 8 packaging uses fewer resources than other materials and that “recycled plastic is used as raw
 9 material for other products like park benches, camping gear, backpacks and even some clothes.”
 10 *Id.* Besides these three paragraphs, Plaintiffs’ Complaint identifies no other statements to the
 11 public in support of their theory that ExxonMobil misleadingly represented the economic
 12 feasibility of plastic recycling.

13 B. Current Statements About Advanced Recycling

14 Part IV.D.3 of Plaintiffs’ Complaint challenges statements about ExxonMobil’s advanced
 15 recycling operations in Texas. According to Plaintiffs, advanced recycling “is an industry catch-
 16 all term for a variety of processes—including pyrolysis, gasification, hydrolysis, methanolysis,
 17 and more—that are intended to break a polymer down to its basic chemical elements.” Compl.
 18 ¶ 10. Those basic chemical elements can then be reused to manufacture new products, like fuel or
 19 other plastic products. Plaintiffs allege that ExxonMobil “promotes advanced recycling as the
 20 panacea for the obvious inadequacy of mechanical recycling.” *Id.* ¶ 140. But the few statements
 21 about advanced recycling identified in the Complaint say nothing of the sort.

22 In paragraph 140, Plaintiffs quote a statement by ExxonMobil that “‘deployed together’
 23 with mechanical recycling, ‘advanced’ recycling offers a ‘huge opportunity’ to ‘strengthen
 24 circularity’ and ‘help … address the plastic waste challenge.’” *Id.* In paragraph 142, Plaintiffs
 25 fault ExxonMobil for truthfully telling its customers that certain of its products are “certified
 26 circular”; Plaintiffs even cite the “disclaimer” where ExxonMobil explains exactly what certified

27 ⁸ See Schildgen, *supra* note 1; see also *Rise Above Plastics*, SURFRIDER FOUNDATION,
 28 <https://www.surfrider.org/programs/rise-above-plastics> (“Our mission” includes “advocating for a
 reduction of single-use plastics and the recycling of all plastics”).

1 circular means. *Id.* ¶ 142. And paragraph 144 challenges ExxonMobil’s alleged claim “that
 2 approximately 90% of plastic waste processed at Baytown is transformed into *basic molecules*” to
 3 “make a range of products” with “independent estimates from industry experts” that only 25% of
 4 plastic waste is converted into feedstocks for *new plastics*. *Id.* ¶ 144.⁹ Besides these three
 5 paragraphs, Plaintiffs’ Complaint identifies no other statements in support of their theory that
 6 ExxonMobil misleadingly represented anything about advanced recycling.

7 C. Plaintiffs’ Theory Of Causation

8 So how do Plaintiffs get from these 10 paragraphs to the conclusion that ExxonMobil
 9 “caused the single-use plastics pollution crisis”? Compl. ¶ 3. The Complaint does not say. Its
 10 entire causal theory hangs on the allegation that “[c]onsumers purchased more plastics made from
 11 virgin polymers than they otherwise would have,” *id.* ¶ 138, “based in part on the false notion that
 12 single-use plastic can be recycled or safely disposed,” *id.* ¶ 14. How much more? Of what
 13 specific plastic products? Was the increase sufficient to materially alter pollution levels? How did
 14 the plastic that ExxonMobil allegedly promoted end up in the environment? Was it littered in
 15 violation of state and local law? Is it the result of deficient municipal landfilling practices? Did it
 16 wash ashore from the Pacific Ocean? These and other basic questions about how ExxonMobil’s
 17 alleged actions could have plausibly caused any of the harm that Plaintiffs allege are entirely
 18 unanswered in the Complaint.

19 IV. ARGUMENT

20 A. Plaintiffs Do Not Allege A Viable Nuisance Claim

21 Plaintiffs’ nuisance claims fail for two reasons. *First*, Plaintiffs do not allege an actionable
 22 theory of nuisance liability. In California, a product manufacturer can be held liable in nuisance if
 23 it instructs consumers to use or dispose of a product in a hazardous manner—for example, if it
 24 instructs consumers to use lead paint inside their homes or instructs businesses to pour toxic
 25 chemicals down the drain. Plaintiffs do not allege that ExxonMobil did anything like that. *Second*,

26
 27 ⁹ James Bruggers, *The Missing Equations at ExxonMobil’s Advanced Recycling Operation*,
 28 INSIDE CLIMATE NEWS (Nov. 1, 2023), <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/01112023/missing-equations-exxonmobil-s-advanced-recycling-operation/> (emphasis added) (incorporated by reference at Compl. ¶ 144 n.158).

1 Plaintiffs do not allege facts plausibly showing causation. On the contrary, the unstated causal
 2 theory underlying their Complaint—namely, that a handful of isolated statements across decades
 3 by a raw-material supplier so dramatically altered consumer demand for plastic that they
 4 materially increased pollution levels—is implausible on its face.

5 1. *Plaintiffs do not allege an actionable theory of nuisance liability*

6 Over the past several decades, California courts have rigorously policed the boundary
 7 between nuisance and products liability as plaintiffs have come up with ever more inventive ways
 8 to challenge the harms allegedly caused by products they do not like. “The law of nuisance is not
 9 intended to serve as a surrogate for ordinary products liability.” *City of Modesto Redev. Agency v.*
 10 *Superior Court*, 119 Cal. App. 4th 28, 39 (2004) (citing *City of San Diego v. U.S. Gypsum Co.*, 30
 11 Cal. App. 4th 575 (1994)); *see also, e.g.*, *Hinds Invs., L.P. v. Angioli*, 445 F. App’x 917, 919 (9th
 12 Cir. 2011); *Santa Clara*, 137 Cal. App. 4th at 313.

13 Under this body of case law, claims challenging the “manufacture, distribution, and
 14 supplying” of an allegedly harmful product, and “any failure to warn” consumers about the
 15 dangers of such a product, “do[] not fall within the context of nuisance, but [are] better analyzed
 16 through the law of negligence or products liability, which have well-developed precedents to
 17 determine liability.” *City of Modesto*, 119 Cal. App. 4th at 42. There is a narrow exception to this
 18 general rule: Product manufacturers can be held liable in nuisance if the manufacturer knowingly
 19 promoted the product for a hazardous use or designed a hazardous waste disposal system. *Santa*
 20 *Clara*, 137 Cal. App. 4th at 309-10. Thus, for example, lead paint manufacturers can be held
 21 liable on nuisance claims for “their affirmative promotion of lead paint for interior use,” which
 22 they “*knew to be hazardous*.” *People v. ConAgra Grocery Products Co.*, 17 Cal. App. 5th 51, 84
 23 (2017). As the Ninth Circuit has summarized, a product manufacturer may be liable for nuisance
 24 under California law if it: “(1) affirmatively instructs the polluting entity to dispose of hazardous
 25 substances in an improper or unlawful manner, or (2) manufactures or installs the disposal
 26 system” that pollutes. *Team Enters.*, 647 F.3d at 912 (citation omitted).

27 Plaintiffs do not state an actionable nuisance claim under this doctrine. The Complaint
 28 alleges that ExxonMobil misrepresented: (i) that plastic could safely be “landfilled,” Compl.

¶¶ 112-16; (ii) that mechanical recycling was “economically feasible,” *id.* ¶¶ 117-38; and (iii) the benefits of advanced recycling, *id.* ¶¶ 139-45. Even assuming that ExxonMobil actually made the kinds of statements that Plaintiffs allege, *but see* Section IV.B.3, *infra*, those statements do not amount to promoting plastic for any particular use by consumers. They are not akin to “instructing the purchaser to use [plastic] in a hazardous manner,” *Santa Clara*, 137 Cal. App. 4th at 309, or to dispose of plastic “improperly,” *City of Modesto*, 119 Cal. App. 4th at 43. On the contrary, Plaintiffs’ whole theory, alleged in the Complaint’s very first paragraph, is that plastic is harmful to the environment *regardless* of how it is used—Plaintiffs simply want consumers to use less. Compl. ¶ 1 (“harmful, toxic products that cannot be safely disposed through recycling or other means”). Plaintiffs’ allegations thus amount to the contention that ExxonMobil failed to warn (or misled) consumers about the consequences of their plastic consumption—namely, that plastic could or would *necessarily* cause environmental harm because “[s]ingle-use plastics are toxic products that cannot be safely disposed.” *Id.* ¶ 4; *see also, e.g., id.* ¶ 5 (“impossible to safely landfill, recycle, or burn”).

As controlling case law confirms, that is not a viable nuisance theory. Take, for instance, the Ninth Circuit’s decision in *Team Enterprises*. There, a dry cleaner claimed that the manufacturer of a recycling system for PCE-laden wastewater was liable in nuisance because its system resulted in toxic wastewater being poured down the drain. 647 F.3d at 906, 912. As relevant here, the Ninth Circuit held that the nuisance claim failed as a matter of law because the manufacturer did not give the dry cleaner “instructions to dispose” of the toxic wastewater “in the ground.” *Id.* at 912 (quotations and alterations omitted). In *Hinds*, the Ninth Circuit went one step further: It affirmed the dismissal of a nuisance claim where the defendant “recommend[ed]” disposing of toxic wastewater by pouring it down the drain, but did not affirmatively instruct users to discharge solvent wastes improperly. 445 F. App’x at 919-20.

This is a much easier case. ExxonMobil did not recommend improper disposal of plastic, much less direct “the improper [disposal] of [plastic] wastes.” *Hinds*, 445 F. App’x at 919 (quotations omitted); *see also, e.g., City of Merced Redev. Agency v. Exxon Mobil Corp.*, 2015 WL 471672, at *22 (E.D. Cal. Feb. 4, 2015) (no nuisance liability where plaintiff did “not assert

1 Defendants instructed purchasers of its MTBE-containing gasoline to *use* it in a hazardous
 2 manner” or “affirmatively promote[] any such *use*”); *City of Modesto*, 119 Cal. App. 4th at 42
 3 (“manufacturing or selling solvents to dry cleaners, with knowledge of the hazards of those
 4 substances, without alerting the dry cleaners to proper methods of disposal” not actionable).
 5 ExxonMobil did not tell consumers how to use or dispose of any specific plastic product. At
 6 most, ExxonMobil is alleged to have encouraged the public to use products made of a material
 7 that Plaintiffs think is harmful for the environment, while failing to warn (or misleading)
 8 consumers about those environmental risks. That is not a viable nuisance theory.

9 Plaintiffs cannot repackage their claims by arguing that ExxonMobil is liable in nuisance
 10 for encouraging consumers to recycle. Not only is that theory absent from the Complaint, but it
 11 fails as a matter of law on its face. Although not a complete solution to plastic waste, recycling is
 12 in no way a hazardous use. How could it be? There is nothing inherently hazardous about
 13 recycling itself, unlike, for example, using lead paint inside homes and pouring solvents down the
 14 drain. And State, municipal, and federal policy affirmatively “encourage[s]” people to recycle.
 15 See Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 14576(a); *see supra* at p. 2 & n.3. It should go without saying that
 16 uniform public policy does not promote the hazardous use of a product—and ExxonMobil cannot
 17 be held liable in nuisance for encouraging something that is not itself a hazardous use.

18 Indeed, if recycling were a hazardous use, the State and its municipalities—and even
 19 Plaintiffs themselves—would likewise be liable for the alleged plastic-pollution nuisance. After
 20 all, the State, its municipalities, and Plaintiffs themselves have adopted policies and made express
 21 statements encouraging people to recycle, which on Plaintiffs’ theory here eventually leads to
 22 plastic waste. This Court should reject out of hand a theory that would render Plaintiffs liable to
 23 each other and the State and municipalities liable to the public. Plaintiffs may have soured on the
 24 environmental benefits of recycling, but that does not make recycling a hazardous use or give rise
 25 to liability under California nuisance law.

26

27

28

1 2. *Plaintiffs fail to allege causation*

2 “Causation is an essential element of a public nuisance claim.” *Citizens for Odor*
 3 *Nuisance Abatement v. City of San Diego*, 8 Cal. App. 5th 350, 359 (2017) (“CONA”). Plaintiffs’
 4 claims also fail on this element.

5 Plaintiffs contend that ExxonMobil’s public statements about plastics “caused the single-
 6 use plastics pollution crisis.” Compl. ¶ 3. But the only causal allegation contained in Plaintiffs’
 7 Complaint is that “[c]onsumers purchased more plastics made from virgin polymers than they
 8 otherwise would have.” *Id.* ¶ 138; *see also id.* ¶ 14 (“As a result of ExxonMobil’s conduct,
 9 consumers have expanded their use of plastics[.]”). Not only is that barebones allegation
 10 “conclusory,” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 680-82 (2009), but it is manifestly insufficient to
 11 plead causation. That ExxonMobil’s statements led *some* consumers to choose plastic over
 12 alternative materials does not mean that ExxonMobil’s statements were a “substantial factor,”
 13 *CONA*, 8 Cal. App. 5th at 359, in bringing about the “single-use plastics pollution crisis,” Compl.
 14 ¶ 1. If only a few consumers’ purchasing decisions were influenced by ExxonMobil’s statements,
 15 then those statements could not be the cause of the alleged nuisance because they would have had
 16 only a “trivial” effect on plastic pollution levels, Cal. Civ. Jury Instructions § 430, like throwing
 17 “a lighted match into a forest fire,” *Mitchell v. Gonzales*, 54 Cal. 3d 1041, 1053 (1991). To state a
 18 viable nuisance claim, Plaintiffs would need to allege that ExxonMobil’s statements so effectively
 19 altered consumer behavior that they materially impacted pollution levels—i.e., that they *actually*
 20 caused or contributed to the alleged nuisance.

21 There is a good reason that the Complaint includes no such allegations: It would be
 22 difficult, if not impossible, to allege consistent with Rule 11 that a handful of statements scattered
 23 across multiple decades so materially altered consumer purchasing behavior that they affected
 24 statewide (or global) pollution levels. Most of the statements alleged in the Complaint were not
 25 even available to consumers when they were making purchasing decisions—they were not, for
 26 example, on product packaging or other notices that would immediately attract consumer
 27 attention at the moment of purchase. And it is completely implausible to claim that general
 28 statements about “foam egg cartons and meat trays” from the 1960s, Compl. ¶ 113, a *New York*

1 Times statement from 1983, *id.* ¶ 127, and so on, Section III.A-B., *supra*, could have
 2 fundamentally altered the way consumers think about and consume plastic. That is especially true
 3 given that State, federal, and municipal policymakers have consistently and vigorously urged the
 4 public to recycle (as have Plaintiffs themselves). *Supra* at pp. 2, 5-6. If anything affected
 5 consumer beliefs about plastic recyclability, it would have been this consistent chorus from
 6 government officials and environmental organizations, not isolated statements by ExxonMobil.

7 On top of that, “the complaint itself gives reasons to believe that” allegedly mistaken
 8 views on the recyclability of single-use plastics were *not* the reason consumers bought products
 9 involving those plastics in any event. *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 568 (2007); *see*
 10 *Orange Cnty. Water Dist. v. Alcoa Global Fasteners, Inc.*, 12 Cal. App. 5th 252, 342-43 (2017)
 11 (“A defendant’s conduct is not a substantial factor in bringing about harm … if the harm would
 12 have been sustained even if the defendant had not acted.”). For one thing, “[f]ast food items are
 13 the most common form of single-use plastic pollution.” Compl. ¶ 87. Plaintiffs offer no facts
 14 plausibly showing that consumers would have purchased materially less fast food—or been
 15 willing to pay higher prices—if only they had known more about the environmental risks of
 16 single-use plastic. For another, the challenge of plastic waste is not a secret. “Since the 1980s,”
 17 Plaintiffs allege, “ExxonMobil has admitted to the public that its products are the cause of single-
 18 use plastic pollution.” *Id.* ¶ 146. In all likelihood, consumers purchased single-use-plastic
 19 products not because they misunderstood plastic recyclability or the potential harms to the
 20 environment, but rather because they valued other things more highly, like cost and convenience.
 21 As between this “obvious alternative explanation” for consumers’ plastic consumption and the
 22 theory indirectly adverted to in the Complaint, the notion that isolated statements by a raw
 23 material supplier scattered across decades caused or even materially contributed to global plastic
 24 pollution “is not a plausible conclusion.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 682.

25 Plaintiffs’ Complaint also makes no effort whatsoever even to theoretically link the rise in
 26 plastic pollution to ExxonMobil’s statements about recycling. The Complaint does not say, for
 27 example, how it believes that plastic from single-use products made its way into the environment.
 28 To the extent Plaintiffs believe that plastic made its way into the environment because consumers

1 or businesses littered, it goes without saying that ExxonMobil’s statements about *recycling* could
 2 not have caused people to *litter*—if anything, the opposite would be true. Maybe Plaintiffs’
 3 theory is instead that plastic makes its way into the environment during the recycling process or
 4 from landfills—but ExxonMobil’s statements likewise are not the cause of defects in municipal
 5 recycling and landfilling practices. Or maybe the plastic washes ashore from the Pacific Ocean—
 6 but Plaintiffs likewise offer no allegations plausibly explaining any causal connection between
 7 ExxonMobil’s statements and plastic pollution in the Pacific. In short, the Complaint provides no
 8 factual allegations plausibly explaining how ExxonMobil’s statements could have caused or
 9 materially contributed to not only increased levels of plastic *consumption*, but also increased
 10 levels of plastic *pollution* in the environment. It “seems” instead that Plaintiffs want to impose
 11 liability on ExxonMobil “for the acts of” third parties who actually pollute (whether intentionally
 12 or inadvertently), which is “contrary to every norm of established jurisprudence.” *People by*
 13 *James v. PepsiCo, Inc.*, 222 N.Y.S.3d 907, 914 (2024) (rejecting argument in context of duty).

14 **B. Plaintiffs Do Not Allege A Viable UCL Claim**

15 Plaintiffs’ UCL claim likewise fails for multiple reasons. *First*, Plaintiffs’ claim fails for
 16 lack of statutory standing. Private plaintiffs can sue under the UCL only if they have “lost money
 17 or property as a result of the unfair competition.” Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 17204. “The phrase
 18 ‘as a result of’ in its plain and ordinary sense means ‘caused by’ and requires a showing of a
 19 causal connection or reliance on the alleged misrepresentation.” *Cal. Med. Ass’n v. Aetna Health*
 20 *of Cal. Inc.*, 14 Cal. 5th 1075, 1096 (2023) (“CMA”). Here, there is no alleged causal connection
 21 between ExxonMobil’s statements and the resources Plaintiffs allegedly diverted to mitigate the
 22 effects of plastic waste. *See* Section IV.A.2, *supra*; *see also, e.g., In re Turner*, 859 F.3d 1145,
 23 1151 (9th Cir. 2017) (affirming dismissal for failure to allege causation under UCL); *HomeLight,*
 24 *Inc. v. Shkipin*, 721 F. Supp. 3d 1019, 1024 (N.D. Cal. 2024) (similar).

25 *Second*, most of the statements underlying Plaintiffs’ UCL claim are from outside the
 26 limitations period. The UCL’s statute of limitations is four years. Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code
 27 § 17208. Under the “common law accrual rules” applicable to the UCL, *Aryeh v. Canon Bus.*
 28 *Sols., Inc.*, 55 Cal. 4th 1185, 1193 (2013), Plaintiffs’ claims based on statements from decades

1 ago are time barred. The statements were made outside the limitations period. *See* Compl. ¶¶ 112-
 2 128, 139 (statements from “1960s” to 2005). Those statements allegedly caused global plastic
 3 waste impacting California well before 2021. *See, e.g., id.* ¶ 155 (alleging \$428 million in
 4 statewide plastic-pollution expenditures in 2015). And Plaintiffs themselves allege that they took
 5 action to address plastic pollution well before that time. *See, e.g., Compl.* ¶¶ 165 (“focus on
 6 combatting plastic pollution” “since 2006”), 177-79 (“beach clean up activities since 2001”), 197
 7 (diversion of resources “[s]ince 2019”). Under a straightforward application of settled limitations
 8 principles, Plaintiffs cannot bring a UCL claim based on statements made decades ago.¹⁰

9 *Last*, Plaintiffs allege no viable theory of UCL liability for the reasons set out below.

10 1. *Plaintiffs do not allege unlawful conduct*

11 Under the “unlawful prong,” plaintiffs can plead a UCL claim based on business practices
 12 that violate some other local, state, or federal law. *See, e.g., Rezner v. Bayerische Hypo-Und*
 13 *Vereinsbank AG*, 2011 WL 6329854, at *5 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 8, 2011). Here, Plaintiffs allege that
 14 ExxonMobil violated provisions of the Fish & Game Code making it unlawful to “deposit,”
 15 “permit to pass into” or “place” pollution into the waters of this State. Compl. ¶ 232. Plaintiffs’
 16 Complaint does not explain how, exactly, they think ExxonMobil violated this statute. They do
 17 not allege that ExxonMobil “deposited” pollution in California waters. They do not allege that
 18 ExxonMobil “placed” pollution where it could pass into California waters. Cal. Fish & Game
 19 Code § 5650. Nor do they allege that ExxonMobil abandoned, disposed of, or threw away
 20 pollution within 150 feet of the high water mark of the waters of this State. Cal. Fish & Game
 21 Code § 5652.

22

23 ¹⁰ Within the limitations period, Plaintiffs challenge a few statements about ExxonMobil’s
 24 advanced recycling operations in Texas. *See* Compl. ¶¶ 140-44. Although these statements are not
 25 time-barred, *see Aryeh*, 55 Cal. 4th at 1199, Plaintiffs have no viable theory of statutory standing.
 26 The Complaint does not allege that *contemporaneous* statements about plastic have affected
 27 consumer demand for plastic so as to increase the amount of resources Plaintiffs have diverted.
 28 That is, Plaintiffs do not allege that consumers purchased more single-use plastics because of
 statements ExxonMobil made about advanced recycling in the last few years. They do not allege
 that any such increase materially affected the amount of plastic pollution in California. And they
 do not allege that they diverted additional resources because of ExxonMobil’s recent statements
 about its operations in Texas.

1 By process of elimination, Plaintiffs' theory must be that by promoting plastics,
 2 ExxonMobil "permit[ted]" pollution "to pass into" State waters. But that theory fails too, for two
 3 independent reasons. *First*, it rests on the same deficient causal chain described above. *See*
 4 Section IV.A.2, *supra*. *Second*, it stretches the word "permit" beyond its breaking point.

5 To "permit" has a well-settled meaning. It means "to consent expressly or formally" or to
 6 "authorize."¹¹ *See George v. Susanville Elementary Sch. Dist.*, 103 Cal. App. 5th 349, 356 (2024)
 7 ("dictionary definitions" inform ordinary meaning); *City of Los Angeles v. Barr*, 941 F.3d 931,
 8 940 (9th Cir. 2019). That definition is confirmed by context. All the words surrounding "permit"
 9 ("deposit," "place," "dispose of," etc.) presuppose that the alleged violator has *control* over the
 10 polluting item. *See, e.g., Fischer v. United States*, 603 U.S. 480, 487 (2024) ("a word is given
 11 more precise content by the neighboring words with which it is associated"). The same is true if
 12 "permit" is read in line with its dictionary definition: A defendant exercises some degree of
 13 control over pollution when it consents to someone polluting or authorizes them to pollute.

14 Plaintiffs' theory, by contrast, would require reading "permit" to mean something like to
 15 "indirectly cause." Not only is that reading untenable as a matter of text and context, but it would
 16 also pose serious problems for Plaintiffs themselves. They too would be liable for substantial civil
 17 penalties, Cal. Fish & Game Code § 5650.1(a) (up to \$25,000 per violation), if the statute reaches
 18 anyone who in some sense "caused" plastic pollution by promoting recycling. After all, they also
 19 promoted recycling and thus could be said to have "permitted" plastic pollution under their own
 20 theory. The idea that prominent environmental organizations are liable under the Fish & Game
 21 Code for promoting recycling is absurd, underscoring that Plaintiffs' reading must be rejected.
 22 *Nat'l Shooting Sports Found., Inc. v. State*, 5 Cal. 5th 428, 433 (2018). Indeed, Plaintiffs'
 23 grasping interpretation would make indirectly contributing to plastic pollution under § 5650 a
 24 *crime*. Cal. Fish & Game Code § 12000; *see Leocal v. Ashcroft*, 543 U.S. 1, 12 (2004). As

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 26 ¹¹ *See Permit*, MERRIAM WEBSTER, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/permit>; *Permit*,
 27 BLACK'S LAW DICTIONARY (12th ed. 2024) ("1. To consent to formally; to allow (something) to
 28 happen, esp. by an official ruling, decision, or law ..."); *Permit*, OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY,
<https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=permit> ("to allow or give consent to
 (a person or thing) to do or undergo something").

1 between a plain-text interpretation of a statute that appropriately cabins its scope and an atextual
 2 interpretation that opens up unanticipated civil and criminal liability, there can only be one
 3 answer. Because ExxonMobil is not alleged to have authorized or consented to—i.e., permitted—
 4 any pollution of State waters, Plaintiffs’ claim that ExxonMobil acted unlawfully under the Fish
 5 & Game Code fails. *See, e.g., Walker v. Dreyer’s Grand Ice Cream, Inc.*, 2006 WL 2642535, at
 6 *2 (N.D. Cal. Sept. 14, 2006) (UCL claim fails where plaintiff fails to allege “predicate”
 7 violation).

8 2. *Plaintiffs do not allege unfair conduct.*

9 A defendant can also violate the UCL by acting unfairly. Plaintiffs offer two theories of
 10 unfairness. Neither is viable.

11 First, Plaintiffs allege that ExxonMobil’s conduct contravenes the State’s policy of
 12 preventing pollution. Compl. ¶ 234. Ironically, the provision Plaintiffs cite is part of a statute
 13 vesting in the *Attorney General* the authority to litigate pollution cases. *See Cal. Gov’t Code*
 14 §§ 12600(b), 12607. Regardless, there is no “close nexus between the challenged act and the
 15 legislative policy” here, because there is no nexus at all between ExxonMobil’s alleged marketing
 16 statements as a supplier of the raw materials for plastic products and the state policy embodied in
 17 a statute authorizing the Attorney General to sue to remediate pollution. *Hodsdon v. Mars, Inc.*,
 18 891 F.3d 857, 866 (9th Cir. 2018).¹² If there were, any marketing for any product that ends up
 19 being discarded—recyclable or not—would be actionable under the UCL. Plaintiffs cannot stake
 20 out an unfairness claim by casting public policy at that high a level of generality. *See id.* at 866-
 21 67 (insufficient to identify only a “general policy” against some type of social ill, like “child or
 22 slave labor” or “urban blight”). Indeed, if any public policy is relevant here, it is the State’s
 23 overwhelming policy *in favor of recycling*. *See supra* at pp. 2, 5-6 & n.3. But ExxonMobil is not
 24

25 ¹² California courts apply multiple tests to determine whether conduct is “unfair.” *See, e.g., Doe v.*
 26 *CVS Pharm., Inc.*, 982 F.3d 1204, 1214-15 (9th Cir. 2020). ExxonMobil understands Plaintiffs’
 27 allegation in paragraph 234 to arise under the “tethering” test, which asks “whether the
 28 challenged conduct is tethered to an[] underlying constitutional, statutory or regulatory
 provision.” *Id.* at 1214 (quotations omitted). Plaintiffs appear to allege that ExxonMobil’s
 conduct violates the public policy reflected in Section 12600.

1 alleged to have violated that policy; if anything, it is alleged to have *furthered* that policy by
 2 promoting the virtues of recycling, just like the State and Plaintiffs themselves.

3 *Second*, Plaintiffs allege that ExxonMobil’s “conduct profits from its harms to public trust
 4 resources.” Compl. ¶ 235. It is difficult to make sense of this allegation. All this Court needs to
 5 know, however, is that the Complaint does not allege facts supporting this theory. Although the
 6 Complaint alleges that ExxonMobil indirectly profits from conduct (consumer purchases of
 7 plastic products) that Plaintiffs apparently believe leads (through unspecified mechanisms) to
 8 pollution that harms public trust resources, the Complaint does not allege that ExxonMobil profits
 9 from those harms to the public trust resources themselves. In other words, the Complaint does not
 10 allege that ExxonMobil makes money *because* the environment suffers, as Plaintiffs’ theory of
 11 UCL liability would require.

12 3. *Plaintiffs allege no actionable misrepresentations*

13 Plaintiffs’ remaining UCL theory is that ExxonMobil misrepresented the benefits or
 14 recyclability of plastic. Compl. ¶¶ 233, 236. Plaintiffs allege no actionable misrepresentations.

15 Misrepresentation-based UCL claims must “satisfy the stringent pleading requirements of
 16 Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 9(b).” *Kirsopp v. Yamaha Motor Co.*, 2014 WL 12577429, at *10
 17 (C.D. Cal. Aug. 27, 2014); *Wilson v. Frito-Lay N. Am., Inc.*, 2013 WL 1320468, at *5 (N.D. Cal.
 18 Apr. 1, 2013) (similar). Here, only 10 paragraphs in the Complaint even arguably satisfy 9(b)’s
 19 particularity requirement, as paragraphs 113, 114, 115, 120, 126, 127, 140, 142, 143, and 144 are
 20 the only ones that identify actual statements.¹³ Accordingly, we focus here only on these
 21 paragraphs.

22 In evaluating those paragraphs, the standard is whether the cited statement is “false” or
 23 “has the likely effect of misleading or deceiving” consumers. *Garcia v. Sony Computer Ent. Am., LLC*, 859 F. Supp. 2d 1056, 1062 (N.D. Cal. 2012). This analysis must be conducted from the
 24 perspective of “a reasonable … ordinary consumer within the target population.” *Sepanossian v.*

25
 26
 27 ¹³ The remainder of the Complaint, by contrast, consists mainly of: empty rhetoric with no
 28 supporting factual assertions (e.g., Compl. ¶¶ 106, 116, 136); cherrypicked statements from
 internal documents, which obviously are not actionable (e.g., *id.* ¶¶ 98, 100-01, 106, 121); and
 public studies about the problems with recycling or harms from plastic waste (*id.* ¶¶ 80, 117).

1 *Nat'l Ready Mix Co.*, 97 Cal. App. 5th 192, 200 (2023); *Patricia A. Murray Dental Corp. v.*
 2 *Dentsply Int'l, Inc.*, 19 Cal. App. 5th 258, 272 (2018) (“targeted consumer”).

3 The handful of statements comprising ExxonMobil’s alleged “campaign” of recycling
 4 deception cover three topics: (1) comparative benefits of paper and plastic; (2) economic
 5 feasibility of recycling; and (3) ExxonMobil’s advanced recycling program. None is actionable.
 6 Indeed, in many instances, Plaintiffs simply misrepresent what the documents say or divorce the
 7 statements from context. *See Becerra v. Dr Pepper/Seven Up, Inc.*, 945 F.3d 1225, 1229 (9th Cir.
 8 2019); *see also In re Ethereummax Inv. Litig.*, 2023 WL 6787827, at *27 (C.D. Cal. June 6,
 9 2023).

10 a. Historical statements comparing paper and plastic. The Complaint alleges that,
 11 “[b]eginning in the 1960s,” Mobil Chemical “falsely contended that landfilling plastic was more
 12 environmentally friendly than paper.” Compl. ¶ 113. For starters, a claim that landfilling plastic is
 13 “more environmentally friendly than paper” is not an “objectively verifiable fact.” *Edmunson v.*
 14 *Procter & Gamble Co.*, 2011 WL 1897625, at *3 (S.D. Cal. May 17, 2011) (“subjective
 15 representations related to product superiority … not actionable under the UCL”). Whether one
 16 product is more or less “environmentally friendly” than another is an “abstract” question that
 17 depends on weighing different environmental values, not an objectively provable or disprovable
 18 fact. *See Brown v. Madison Reed, Inc.*, 2023 WL 8613496, at *2 (9th Cir. Dec. 13, 2023);
 19 *Edmundson v. Procter & Gamble Co.*, 537 F. App’x 708, 709 (9th Cir. 2013) (“general,
 20 subjective, unverifiable” claims not actionable); *Oestreicher v. Alienware Corp.*, 544 F. Supp. 2d
 21 964, 973–74 (N.D. Cal. 2008) (claims of “higher performance,” “longer battery life,” “richer
 22 multimedia experience,” and “faster access to data” not actionable); *see also Newcal Indus., Inc.*
 23 *v. Ikon Off. Sol.*, 513 F.3d 1038, 1053 (9th Cir. 2008).

24 In any event, none of the statements cited by Plaintiffs says that plastic is more
 25 “environmentally friendly” than paper. Mobil stated, for example, that foam cartons and trays
 26 “offer a number of environmental advantages when compared with other packaging materials,”
 27 Compl. ¶ 113, which is true. Foam containers can “compress to a fraction of their original size
 28 when packed in a sanitary landfill,” thereby “occup[ying] less space,” “reduce[] transportation

1 costs” (because of lighter weight); and “generate[] fewer air emissions.” *Id.* ¶ 114. ExxonMobil
 2 also truthfully stated that plastic cartons “have one-tenth of the bulk of paper bags and therefore
 3 take up less room in landfills.” *Id.* ¶ 114. And it accurately stated that foam “does not decompose
 4 readily and provides a stable, clean fill.” *Id.* ¶ 115. Truthfully reciting some of the benefits of a
 5 material (e.g., less bulky) cannot be reasonably understood as a representation that the material is
 6 objectively more “environmentally friendly” under all possible circumstances and has no
 7 countervailing disadvantages.

8 **b. Historical statements about the economic feasibility of recycling.** The next section of
 9 Plaintiffs’ Complaint alleges that ExxonMobil misleadingly “promote[d] recycling as a viable
 10 option.” Compl. ¶ 119. By this, Plaintiffs appear to mean that ExxonMobil represented that
 11 recycling was an economical solution to fully or substantially eradicate plastic waste. Here, too,
 12 Plaintiffs identify no statements to that effect.¹⁴

13 Instead, the centerpiece of Plaintiffs’ theory is a statement by the National Polystyrene
 14 Recycling Company that “[r]ecycling polystyrene is a highly automated and efficient process that
 15 does not rely on expensive or experimental technology” and then recited the “steps” involved.
 16 Compl. ¶ 120.¹⁵ The Complaint does not allege that any of that is false. And a statement truthfully
 17 describing the polystyrene recycling process does not reasonably imply that plastics recycling
 18 writ large was a complete, economical solution to plastic pollution.

19 _____
 20 ¹⁴ Plaintiffs cite “an internal 1991 memorandum” describing “lobbying efforts to Congress.”
 21 Compl. ¶ 125. It is not clear whether this internal document describing lobbying strategy is meant
 22 to support Plaintiffs’ misrepresentations claims. If it is, the allegation clearly fails. An internal
 23 document cannot deceive consumers. And any theory of liability predicated on lobbying is clearly
 24 foreclosed by the *Noerr-Pennington* doctrine, which holds that “claims … premised [on] First
 25 Amendment-protected petitioning,” including lobbying or advocacy, “cannot form a basis for …
 26 state-law claims,” including under the UCL. *Realtek Semiconductor Corp. v. MediaTek, Inc.*,
 27 2024 WL 1975478, at *5 (N.D. Cal. May 3, 2024); *People ex rel. Gallegos v. Pac. Lumber Co.*,
 28 158 Cal. App. 4th 950, 966 (2008) (UCL); *see also Kottle v. Nw. Kidney Ctrs.*, 146 F.3d 1056,
 1059 (9th Cir. 1998) (“[L]obbying or advocacy before any branch of either federal or state
 government” represents the heartland of the “broad[] … sweep of the *Noerr-Pennington*
 doctrine.”).

20 ¹⁵ Paragraph 124 alleges that ExxonMobil “praised” trade associations for “explaining that many
 21 plastics are easily recyclable.” Compl. ¶ 124. That statement is true. Many plastics *are* easily
 22 recyclable. And Plaintiffs identify no basis to hold ExxonMobil liable for praising statements
 23 made by trade groups.

Paragraph 126 alleges that ExxonMobil misrepresented that “Hefty” brand trash bags were biodegradable, “resulting in settlements with the Federal Trade Commission and the attorneys general for seven states.” Regardless of whether that was false, this allegation does not support the theories of liability alleged. For one thing, a statement about one product’s biodegradability does not advance Plaintiffs’ claim that ExxonMobil misrepresented that *recycling* was an economical solution to plastic waste. For another, the truthfulness of ExxonMobil’s statement was promptly litigated and resolved decades ago, and that information has sat within the domain of “public knowledge” ever since. *See, e.g., Hodsdon*, 891 F.3d at 867 (failing to disclose matter of “public knowledge” is not actionable under UCL). The idea that this statement had lasting effects decades later is not credible.

Last, Plaintiffs cite 1983 statements in *The New York Times* and a film by the American Plastics Council. Compl. ¶ 127. The *New York Times* piece did not state or suggest that recycling was a technologically or economically viable solution to global plastic waste concerns. Instead, it made the far more modest claim that “[m]any plastics can be” recycled, which (obviously) is true. So too for the film’s truthful statements that plastic packaging uses fewer resources and is cheaper to transport than bulkier materials, and that “recycled plastic is used as raw material for other products like park benches, camping gear, backpacks and even some clothes.” *Id.* Those statements are true and not misleading. Contrary to Plaintiffs’ mischaracterization, they do not suggest that recycling will solve the issue of plastic pollution around the world.

c. Statements about advanced recycling. The same fundamental problems plague the Complaint’s challenge to ExxonMobil’s recent statements about its advanced recycling operations in Texas. The Complaint introduces this section by stating that “ExxonMobil promotes advanced recycling as the panacea for the obvious inadequacy of mechanical recycling.” Compl. ¶ 140. But the statements cited in support say nothing like that. Instead, they say that advanced recycling, in combination with traditional recycling, “offers a ‘huge opportunity’ to ‘strengthen circularity’ and ‘help … address the plastic waste challenge.’” *Id.* Describing a technology as offering an opportunity to help with a problem is not a representation that it is “the panacea” to the problem. Nor would any of the quoted statements be actionable, even if the Complaint had not

1 mischaracterized them. Whether advanced recycling presents a “huge opportunity” to “strengthen
 2 circularity” that could “help” address plastic waste is not an “objectively verifiable fact”; instead,
 3 these are nonactionable vague, aspirational, and “subjective representations” about advanced
 4 recycling’s potential environmental impact. *Newcal*, 513 F.3d at 1053; *Myers v. Starbucks Corp.*,
 5 2020 WL 13302437, at *4 (C.D. Cal. July 29, 2020) (“aspirational language” nonactionable); *see also*
 6 *PepsiCo.*, 222 N.Y.S.3d at 916 (dismissing claim “for Defendants’ aspirational statements to
 7 curtail a plastic footprint”).

8 Paragraph 142 next quotes from a subsection of an ExxonMobil sustainability report. It is
 9 highly unlikely that any consumers of plastic products made purchasing decisions based on that
 10 report, especially given that it does not mention or promote any specific consumer products.
 11 Nevertheless, the report also is not even arguably misleading. It states:

12 We sell certified-circular plastics corresponding to the amount of plastic waste we
 13 transform back into usable raw materials. We do this using a mass balance
 14 attribution approach that has been used in other industries for many years. What is
 15 mass balance attribution? In short, it is an accounting process that can be used in
 16 complex value chains like ours in which one input (e.g., plastic waste) is mixed
 17 with other inputs in a way that the different inputs cannot be physically traced
 throughout the system. This widely used approach helps our customers match the
 volume of their certified-circular plastic purchase to a corresponding amount of
 plastic waste that we transformed into usable raw materials.

18 Our advanced recycling facilities and process are certified via an independent,
 19 third-party certification system called International Sustainability and Carbon
 Certification (ISCC) PLUS. ISCC is governed by an association with more than
 20 240 members, including research institutes and NGOs.¹⁶

21 It is not clear from the Complaint what Plaintiffs think is misleading about this statement.
 22 Indeed, the Complaint itself quotes all the “disclaimer[s],” Compl. ¶ 142—which are actually just
 23 body text—explaining how mass-balance attribution works and what the third-party certificates
 24 mean. To the extent Plaintiffs mean to challenge not the sustainability report, but rather
 25 ExxonMobil’s communications about advanced recycling with its customers, Plaintiffs’ claims

26 ¹⁶ *Expanding the Plastics Life Cycle*, EXXON MOBIL (Jan. 8, 2024),
 27 <https://corporate.exxonmobil.com/sustainability-and-reports/sustainability/creating-sustainable-solutions/expanding-the-plastics-life-cycle> (last accessed Mar. 27, 2025) (incorporated by
 28 reference at Compl. ¶¶ 8 & n.2; 9 & n.4; 117 & nn.123-25; 140; and 142).

would fail for an additional reason. The “target audience” for ExxonMobil’s statements about certified circular polymers are not end consumers, but businesses that purchase virgin polymers and convert them into plastic products for *their* customers, “like Taco Bell.” *Id.* ¶ 107. These are highly sophisticated businesses who are not likely to be misled by ExxonMobil’s full disclosures. *Dentsply*, 19 Cal. App. 5th at 272 (UCL claim failed where target audience not misled); *see also Sponchiado v. Apple Inc.*, 2019 WL 6117482, at *5 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 18, 2019) (dismissing UCL claim where disclaimers render challenged misstatements non-misleading).

Finally, paragraph 144 mischaracterizes the document it cites. According to Plaintiffs, ExxonMobil said “that approximately 90% of plastic waste processed at Baytown is transformed into *basic molecules*.” Compl. ¶ 144 (emphasis added). Plaintiffs suggest this is misleading because “independent estimates from industry experts suggest that the actual conversion rate is no higher than 25%.” *Id.* But the article from *Inside Climate News* was not discussing the conversion rate into basic molecules; it “estimate[d] that no more than 25 percent of the incoming plastic waste could be converted *into feedstocks for new plastics*.¹⁷ There is no inconsistency between the statement that 90% of the waste is processed into basic molecules and an alleged third party “estimate” that only 25% of those basic molecules can be used as feedstock for new plastic.¹⁸

C. Plaintiffs’ Complaint Impermissibly Seeks To Regulate Beyond California

Plaintiffs say this case is about “marketing.” Compl. ¶ 7; *see also* Dkt. 19 at 1. But none of the marketing cited in the Complaint is alleged to have been made in or targeted at California.

¹⁷ Bruggers, *supra* note 9 (emphasis added) (incorporated by reference at Compl. ¶ 144 n.158).

¹⁸ Paragraph 143 contains a similar mischaracterization. Plaintiffs allege that ExxonMobil stated “it *will process* at least a billion pounds of plastic in its chemical advanced recycling facilities by 2026.” Compl. ¶ 143 (emphasis added). But the cited document actually states that ExxonMobil “expect[s] to grow” its “recycling *capacity*” to 1 billion pounds. *Annual Report 2022*, EXXON MOBIL, at iv, <https://perma.cc/7SSS-SNAN> (emphasis added) (incorporated by reference at Compl. ¶ 143 n.155). There is a meaningful difference between actually processing waste and expected waste-processing capacity. In any event, this paragraph does not allege a misstatement. Plaintiffs’ point seems to be that advanced recycling will have “little real impact.” Compl. ¶ 143. ExxonMobil disagrees. But Plaintiffs’ opinion that advanced recycling may not work to reduce plastic pollution or “conflicts with zero-carbon and circular economy goals,” *id.* ¶ 144, does not mean that ExxonMobil made any statements of fact that are false and misleading.

1 It should go without saying that California law cannot be used to regulate marketing in
 2 other states. *See, e.g., Bigelow v. Virginia*, 421 U.S. 809, 822-23 (1975) (“Virginia Legislature
 3 could not have regulated the advertiser’s activity in New York, and obviously could not have
 4 proscribed the activity in that State.”); *State of Cal. Auto. Dismantlers Ass’n v. Interins. Exch.*, 180
 5 Cal. App. 3d 735, 746 (1986) (“California has no jurisdiction to regulate or prosecute … activities
 6 conducted in another state.”). Thus, California law cannot be used to regulate, for example,
 7 articles in *The New York Times*, *see, e.g.*, Compl. ¶¶ 113-14, 127, or statements about advanced
 8 recycling published to ExxonMobil’s website from Texas, *id.* ¶¶ 140, 142.

9 Perhaps California law could apply to out-of-state statements that ExxonMobil
 10 specifically directed at California. But the Complaint contains no such allegations. Plaintiffs do
 11 not allege that any of the statements recited in the Complaint targeted California. And in context,
 12 it is clear that those statements were either directed at other states (like New York) or were made
 13 for a nationwide or worldwide audience (like statements on ExxonMobil’s website). That poses
 14 not only a merits problem, but also a jurisdictional problem.

15 This Court cannot exercise personal jurisdiction over ExxonMobil based on statements
 16 ExxonMobil did not purposefully direct at California.¹⁹ To exercise personal jurisdiction over
 17 ExxonMobil, Plaintiffs must allege that it established “minimum contacts” with California. *Int’l*
 18 *Shoe Co. v. Washington*, 326 U.S. 310, 316 (1945). In tort cases, like this one, minimum contacts
 19 requires that the defendant “purposefully direct his activities toward the forum.” *AMA*
 20 *Multimedia, LLC v. Wanat*, 970 F.3d 1201, 1208 (9th Cir. 2020); *Schwarzenegger v. Fred Martin*
 21 *Motor Co.*, 374 F.3d 797, 802 (9th Cir. 2004). Purposeful direction, in turn, requires that
 22 “defendant must have “(1) committed an intentional act, (2) expressly aimed at the forum state,

23
 24 ¹⁹ Courts may “exercise specific jurisdiction over a non-resident defendant only when three
 25 requirements are satisfied: (1) the defendant either purposefully directs its activities or
 26 purposefully avails itself of the benefits afforded by the forum’s laws; (2) the claim arises out of
 27 or relates to the defendant’s forum-related activities; and (3) the exercise of jurisdiction comports
 28 with fair play and substantial justice, i.e., it is reasonable.” *Williams v. Yamaha Motor Co.*, 851
 F.3d 1015, 1020 (9th Cir. 2017). Since the purposeful direction requirement is not met,
 ExxonMobil does not address the other two requirements in detail, but there are no allegations to
 support them either.

1 (3) causing harm that the defendant knows is likely to be suffered in the forum state.” *Axiom*
 2 *Foods, Inc. v. Acerchem Int’l, Inc.*, 874 F.3d 1064, 1069 (9th Cir. 2017).

3 Plaintiffs do not allege that ExxonMobil expressly aimed the challenged statements at
 4 California. Instead, they allege that ExxonMobil made statements aimed at, and disseminated to, a
 5 nationwide audience—in print publications (*The New York Times*) or online (ExxonMobil’s
 6 website). That is insufficient. “Mere passive operation of a website,” the Ninth Circuit has held,
 7 “is insufficient to demonstrate express aiming.” *Will Co. v. Lee*, 47 F.4th 917, 922 (9th Cir. 2022)
 8 (citing *AMA Multimedia*, 970 F.3d at 1209-10). So too for traditional print media. It should be
 9 self-evident that publishing a statement in *The New York Times* is not express aiming at
 10 California. “Providing access to information is not enough to confer jurisdiction in any state
 11 where that information is available.” *X Corp. v. Ctr. for Countering Digital Hate Ltd.*, 724 F.
 12 Supp. 3d 921, 937 (N.D. Cal. 2024); *see also Burdick v. Superior Ct.*, 233 Cal. App. 4th 8, 21
 13 (2015) (“[T]he fact that the newspapers’ websites could be accessed anywhere, including [the
 14 forum state], does not by itself demonstrate that the newspapers were intentionally directing their
 15 website content to a [forum state] audience.” (quoting *Young v. New Haven Advocate*, 315 F.3d
 16 256, 263 (4th Cir. 2002), and collecting cases)).²⁰

17 **V. CONCLUSION**

18 For the foregoing reasons, ExxonMobil respectfully requests that the Court dismiss
 19 Plaintiffs’ Complaint with prejudice in its entirety.

20 Respectfully submitted,

21 Dated: March 27, 2025

22 O’MELVENY & MYERS LLP

23 By: /s/ Dawn Sestito

24 _____
 25 ²⁰ To the extent Plaintiffs allege that ExxonMobil extracted oil and gas and operated refineries in
 26 California or that it owns a subsidiary here, Compl. ¶¶ 34-35, they do not allege any connection
 27 between those activities and the conduct that forms the basis of the Complaint. Similarly,
 28 Plaintiffs allege that ExxonMobil predecessors operated single-use plastic packaging plants in
 California, *id.* ¶ 36, but do not identify when, for how long, or how those plants have any
 connection to the “marketing” claims in this case. Those activities, therefore, do not suffice to
 establish specific jurisdiction either. *Yamashita v. LG Chem, Ltd.*, 62 F.4th 496, 506 (9th Cir.
 2023) (specific jurisdiction “requires a close connection between contacts and injury”).

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